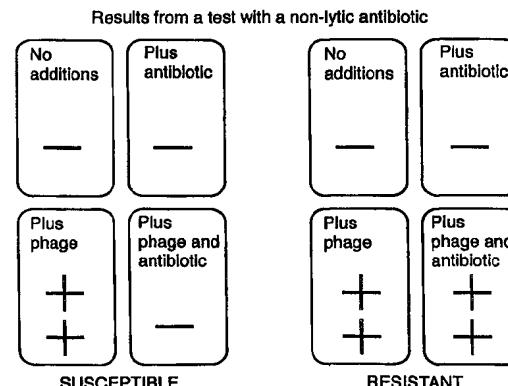
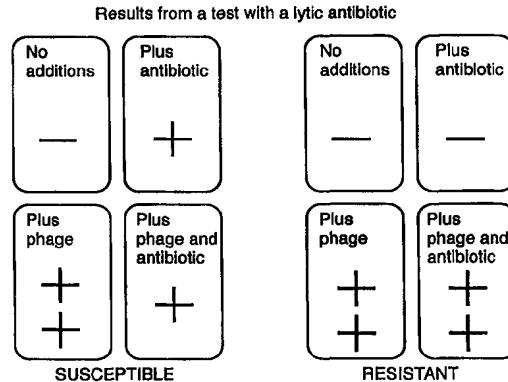




INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification ⁶ : C12Q 1/18, 1/06, 1/48		A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 99/37799 (43) International Publication Date: 29 July 1999 (29.07.99)
<p>(21) International Application Number: PCT/GB99/00089</p> <p>(22) International Filing Date: 12 January 1999 (12.01.99)</p> <p>(30) Priority Data: 9801126.5 21 January 1998 (21.01.98) GB 9816993.1 6 August 1998 (06.08.98) GB </p> <p>(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE [GB/GB]; Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Ively Road, Farnborough, Hampshire GU14 0LX (GB).</p> <p>(72) Inventors; and</p> <p>(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): MURPHY, Melanie, Jane [GB/GB]; DERA Porton Down, Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 0JQ (GB). PRICE, Rachel, Louise [GB/GB]; DERA Porton Down, Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 0JQ (GB). SQUIRRELL, David, James [GB/GB]; DERA Porton Down, Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 0JQ (GB).</p> <p>(74) Agent: BOWDERY, A., O.; D/IPR, Formalities Section (DERA), Poplar 2, MOD Abbey Wood #19, Bristol BS34 8JH (GB).</p>		<p>(81) Designated States: AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CU, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).</p> <p>Published <i>With international search report. Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of the receipt of amendments.</i> </p>	
<p>(54) Title: ANTIBIOTIC SENSITIVITY TESTING</p> <p>(57) Abstract</p> <p>The use of an assay for adenylate kinase in an <i>in vitro</i> test for the effect of external conditions on the growth characteristics of bacterial cells. Such tests in particular include tests for the sensitivity of a bacteria to an antibiotic or a biostatic agent, and tests to assess the growth stage and health of the bacteria. Methods of carrying out these tests and kits for effecting them are also described and claimed.</p>			



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Antibiotic Sensitivity Testing

The present invention relates to a method for testing the growth characteristics of bacteria, in particular to testing 5 for sensitivity to particular antibiotics or biostatic agents, as well as to kits for use in the method.

Bacteria with antibiotic resistance are becoming an increasingly serious problem. The current method for 10 determining the antibiotic resistances of a strain of bacteria is very time consuming. It requires first the isolation of the organism in pure culture. A 'lawn' of the bacteria is then prepared and allowed to grow in the presence of a set of antibiotics. Zones of inhibition of growth around a particular 15 antibiotic show that the bacteria are susceptible (with the size of the zone indicating the degree of susceptibility). Uninhibited growth in the presence of an antibiotic indicates resistance. The process takes at least two days to complete which is far from ideal, particularly in a clinical situation, 20 where the optimum treatment regime of an infected individual may be determined as a result of these tests.

There is a need for a test which allows relatively rapid assessment of antibiotic resistance or susceptibility, for 25 example within a few hours.

Assays for the detection of microorganisms by measurement of adenylate kinase are known for example from International Patent Application Nos. PCT/GB94/00118 and PCT/GB94/01513. 30 Adenylate kinase is an essential enzyme in all living cells which, in the presence of ADP, catalyses the ATP producing reaction shown below.



In this assay, ADP is added as a reagent to the sample under test, preferably in the presence of magnesium ions. ATP produced as a result of the above-mentioned adenylylate kinase reaction can then be detected for example using firefly bioluminescence. For this, reagents such as the combination luciferin/luciferase are added to the mixture, generally after a short incubation period, for example of about 5 minutes, and the luminescent signal produced is monitored.

10

The sensitivity of this assay is limited only by the background level of adenylylate kinase and the purity of reagents used. For example, using *E.coli* as a model system, the adenylylate kinase activity from fewer than 100 cells was measured in a 5 minute incubation assay as illustrated in Figure 1 hereinafter. In the tests used to generate this Figure, the sample volume was 200 μ l.

15

The applicants have found that adenylylate kinase can be used as a sensitive marker of biomass and that the above-mentioned assay techniques can be utilised in studies which give much more detailed information regarding the growth characteristics of bacterial cells.

25

Thus the invention provides the use of an assay for adenylylate kinase in an *in vitro* test for the effect of external conditions on the growth characteristics of bacterial cells.

30

The adenylylate kinase assay provides a rapid and sensitive means of investigating many aspects of bacterial growth and inhibition. The sort of external conditions which may be investigated using the invention are various. For example,

the adenylate kinase assay may be used in methods to determine the sensitivity of a particular bacterial strain or mixed culture to particular antibiotic or biostatic reagents, or the methods may be adapted for use in the screening of 5 reagents for antibiotic or biostatic properties. It has also been found that a comparison of the extracellular adenylate kinase content of a cell culture with the total intracellular and extracellular content is indicative of the growth status and health of the cell culture and thus the adenylate kinase 10 assay may be used to assess these features.

The configuration of the test will take into account the nature of the investigations being undertaken, the type of bacterial samples available, the nature of the samples any 15 reagents if any, which are to be tested and in particular whether they have lytic or non-lytic effects on the cells. Various forms of these tests will be described in more detail hereinafter.

20 In particular however, the invention provides a method for determining the susceptibility of a bacteria to a test material, which method comprises assaying for the adenylate kinase released by lysis of bacteria from a culture containing said reagent and comparing the results with those obtained 25 from a similar adenylate kinase assay which is either of the culture prior to addition of reagent, and/or of lysed bacteria from the same culture at a different point in time and/or of lysed bacteria from a similar culture which does not contain the reagent.

30

The reagents tested may be known antibiotics or biostatic agents, or they may be novel compounds or reagents not

previously known as antibiotics so that the test forms part of a screening program.

Some reagents, e.g. antibiotics such as β -lactam antibiotics 5 such as penicillins like ampicillin and amoxycillin, will cause lysis of bacteria in the culture. Where this does not occur however, it may be necessary to lyse the bacteria prior to effecting the assay. This may be done by various techniques as understood in the art, including treatment with 10 lytic agents as well as physical methods such as subjecting the bacteria to magnetic or electrical fields, or sonication.

Agents producing lysis of bacteria include detergents and enzymes such as bacteriolysin. These are non-specific 15 however and will liberate AK from all living material present in the sample. This may be suitable where the sample comprises a pure culture. However, where the bacteria under investigation is a component of a mixed culture, other strategies may be adopted. Specific measurements from target 20 cells in a mixed sample may be achieved for example by: 1) specific capture of the cells of interest to separate them from contaminating organisms followed by non-specific adenylate kinase measurements; 2) use of a method which only 25 lyses the target cells so only the adenylate kinase from these is measured; or 3) a combination thereof.

Adenylate kinase from the target bacterial cells only (2 above) may be liberated by using a lytic agent which is specific for the particular bacteria under investigation, for 30 example a bacteriophage which is specific for the target bacteria and which brings about lysis of that bacteria. These bacteriophages are viruses which infect bacteria, causing lysis of the cells and release of intracellular components,

including adenylate kinase, into the external medium. This release generally occurs about 30 to 60 minutes after infection. It has been found that fewer than 500 cells are detectable using this method in an assay taking 40 minutes.

5

Phages can infect target cells equally well in pure or mixed culture. By comparing the amount of adenylate kinase which can be chemically extracted from a sample with the amount released after a set time with phage infection, the presence or absence 10 of target cells can be determined and the effects of the test material on their growth measured.

In order for bacteriophage to reproduce and therefore bring about lysis, the host cell must be in the log phase of growth.

15 If growth is inhibited for example, as a result of the presence of a bacteriostatic agent or antibiotic, the bacteriophage will not be able to grow and lyse the cells. This can be used as a basis for a further embodiment of the invention as illustrated below.

20

Alternatively or additionally, a mixed culture may be subjected to a pretreatment step wherein the target bacterial cells are either enriched in the culture and/or separated from it. Such steps are well known in the art. For example, 25 separation may be effected using immunocapture techniques where antibodies or binding fragments thereof which are specific for particular bacteria are used to immobilise those cells on a solid surface, such as a beads, microtitre plates, filter membranes or columns. Magnetic beads may provide a particularly preferred solid surface. Separation of the 30 beads, where appropriate using magnetic separation techniques leads to substantial isolation of the target bacteria as

illustrated hereinafter. It has been found that typically, using magnetic beads as the solid support, detection of fewer than 1000 cells can be achieved with a total assay time of about 30 min. Other materials may also be used as a solid support.

Further specificity may be gained by the use of selective growth media. This can be used in the enrichment step to establish a healthy growing culture, either prior to the immunocapture assay, or infection by a bacteriophage. Additionally, selective media can be used throughout the course of the bacteriophage infection.

Such media will minimise overgrowth by non-target organisms, which may be present, sometimes vastly in excess of the target bacteria.

As mentioned above, the invention may be adapted for use in the testing of bacteria for susceptibility to particular antibiotics or bacteriostatic agents.

Antibiotics such as β -lactams like penicillins work by disrupting cell wall synthesis thereby causing the cells to lose integrity and lyse during replication. This occurs relatively rapidly, about 10-15 minutes after exposure to the antibiotic, provided that the bacteria are actively growing.

Other antibiotics, such as chloramphenicol, do not cause cell lysis but inhibit cell growth in other ways, as do biostatic agents. The mode of action of any particular agent in use is generally understood. The invention may be adapted for use in testing the sensitivity to bacteria to any of these agents.

Specific embodiments of the invention include a method for determining the sensitivity of a bacteria to a lytic antibiotic, said method comprising the steps of (i) separating said bacteria from other microbial species, for example using an immunocapture step; (ii) determining the extracellular adenylylate kinase content of a culture of said bacteria (iii) adding the lytic antibiotic to the culture and incubating it for a period sufficient to allow the antibiotic to exert its lytic effect, and (iv) determining the extracellular adenylylate kinase content of the culture to assess whether lysis has taken place.

In this test, sensitive bacteria would be lysed by the antibiotic soon after addition thereof, generally within about 15 minutes. Hence the free adenylylate kinase content of the culture would increase significantly following addition of the antibiotic as the bacterial cells break open liberating intracellular adenylylate kinase. Optimally measurement of the adenylylate kinase levels would be taken shortly before antibiotic addition, and then again at least 15 minutes after antibiotic addition. The free adenylylate kinase content of cultures of resistant bacteria would remain largely constant. Only the normally present, low level extracellular adenylylate kinase content would therefore be measured and, as explained above, this remains approximately steady for healthy growing cells. Using this method, an assessment of antibiotic sensitivity may be achieved in a period of approximately 40 minutes.

The culture of bacteria used in this method may comprise a selective growth medium which favours said bacteria as discussed above as this will minimise any false positive results as a result of contamination.

Alternatively another embodiment of the invention provides a method for determining the sensitivity of a bacteria to a non-lytic antibiotic or biostatic agent, said method comprising
5 (i) separating said bacteria from other microbial species, for example using an immunocapture technique, (ii) incubating a culture of said bacteria in the presence of said non-lytic antibiotic or biostatic agent and optionally a selective growth medium which favours said bacteria, (iii) determining
10 whether the total adenylate kinase content of the culture increases or decreases over the period of the incubation by removing samples at spaced time periods, lysing bacteria in these samples and assaying for adenylate kinase in said samples.

15

In this case, the amount of adenylate kinase obtainable following chemical lysis over a period of time, for example of about an hour, will remain approximately constant if the bacteria are susceptible to the antibiotic. This is because
20 the bacteria are not able to grow in the presence of the antibiotic. In the case of resistant bacteria however, they will continue to grow and so the levels of adenylate kinase will increase steadily with time.

25

Thus, the sensitivity of a pure culture to any particular antibiotic, whether lytic or non-lytic, may be determined rapidly using the methodology of step I above.

30

Other embodiments of the invention avoid the need for using isolated or pure cultures of bacteria. In particular the invention further provides a method for determining the sensitivity of a bacteria to an antibiotic or biostatic agent, said method comprising

- (a) incubating a first sample of a culture of said bacteria, a second sample in the presence of said antibiotic, a third sample in the presence of a bacteriophage which will specifically lyse said target bacteria and a fourth sample in
5 the presence of both said bacteriophage and said antibiotic;
- (b) determining the adenylate kinase content of each of the first to fourth samples after culture, and
- (c) determining the sensitivity or resistivity of the bacteria on the basis of the adenylate kinase assay results
10 and on the mode of action of the antibiotic or biostatic agent.

Since bacteria must be actively growing in order to be susceptible to antibiotic effect, selective media could be used
15 for an initial enrichment step. This may comprise an incubation of about an hour. After this time the target cells may, if desired, be concentrated by immunocapture into fresh selective medium. The effect of adding antibiotics to the target cells could be determined using adenylate kinase
20 measurements in combination with bacteriophage mediated lysis.

In order for a bacteriophage to reproduce, the host cell must be in the log phase of growth. If growth is inhibited, e.g. due to the presence of an antibiotic, then the phage will not
25 be able to replicate and will, therefore, not be able to cause the host cells to be lysed. Using the adenylate kinase assay in conjunction with bacteriophage, the antibiotic sensitivities of bacteria can be determined within 3 hours. The additional time is needed to establish healthy, growing
30 cells prior to exposure to the antibiotic or infection by the phage. Two types of test outcome are possible depending upon the mode of action of the antibiotic concerned.

The results obtained are summarised in Figure 4 where “-” indicates a result which is consistent with the detection of extracellular adenylate kinase only, “+” indicates a
5 moderately positive result consistent with the detection of intra and extracellular adenylate kinase of the existing sample with no growth, and “++” indicates the detection of elevated levels of adenylate kinase consistent with lysis of the growing culture.

10

As is clear from Figure 4, the pattern of the results obtained using this series of tests can allow ready distinction between susceptible and resistant bacteria, provided the mode of action (lytic or non-lytic) of the agent is understood. The
15 different effects are created as a result of the interaction of the various reagents with the bacteria as will be explained in more detail in the Examples given below.

It has been found that a comparison of the extracellular
20 adenylate kinase content of a cell culture with the total intracellular and extracellular content is indicative of the growth status and health of the cell culture.

Therefore, yet a further embodiment of the invention provides
25 a method of determining the growth phase of a bacterial culture which method comprises

(a) subjecting a first sample of said bacterial culture to a lytic reagent so as to lyse bacterial cells therein,

(b) assaying for adenylate kinase in said first sample and
30 also in a second sample of said culture which has not been exposed to the lytic agent; and

(c) comparing the results obtained from said first and second cultures and assessing the growth stage of the culture.

5 Healthy, log phase cultures have relatively low extracellular adenylate kinase levels (about 1% of the total adenylate kinase) and that the proportion of extracellular adenylate kinase stays relatively constant throughout log phase, and increases as the culture approaches stationary phase.

10 Stationary phase cultures may have as much as a third of the total adenylate kinase in the culture medium. Therefore, using adenylate kinase, the health of cells, as well as their number can be rapidly determined.

15 This method can be used to, for example to confirm that a particular cell culture is growing well, for example where optimum growth is required, for example in fermentation or other processes where bacterial products are required.

20 Alternatively, it may be necessary to confirm cells are growing strongly when screening for antibiotic or bacteriostatic compounds so that false positive results are avoided because weak or stationary phase cultures being used in the test. Furthermore, it may be used to determine what effect environmental factors, such as temperature or culture media, have on the growth of any particular culture.

25

In each case, the adenylate kinase content may be assessed by removing samples of the culture and carrying out an adenylate kinase assay for example as described in International Patent Application Nos. PCT/GB94/00118 and PCT/GB94/01513.

30

The invention also provides test kits for effecting the methods of the invention. The test kit will contain suitable components which would allow the particular assay to be

carried out. For example, for antibiotic sensitivity testing kits may comprise a range of antibiotics, for example in freeze-dried or other preserved states. It may also comprise reagents for extracting adenylate kinase from a sample such as detergents or other chemical lytic agents as well as reagents necessary for assaying for adenylate kinase, such as luciferin/luciferase etc.. In addition, for use in situations where mixed bacterial cultures are to be tested, the kits may contain suitable bacteriophages, also in preserved states such as freeze-dried bacteriophages.

Additionally, the kits may comprises suitable selective growth media. The reagents may be supplied in a suitable reaction container such as a multi-well plate.

The invention will now be particularly described by way of example with reference to the accompanying diagrammatic drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a graph showing the results of experiments to measure the adenylate kinase activity from *E. coli* cells;

Figure 2: shows the results of magnetic bead immunocapture assays for *Salmonella typhimurium* in a pure culture and in the presence of 3.5×10^5 *Bacillus subtilis* var *niger* vegetative cells; where ■ shows adenylate kinase activity from cells captured by beads; and □ shows adenylate kinase activity from residual cells in sample (i.e. in the left hand graph from uncaptured *Salmonella* cells and in the right hand graph from these plus non-specific cells);.

Figure 3 is a graph showing results from an experiment to investigate the time course of phage mediated release of adenylate kinase from a culture of *Escherichia coli* cells;

Figure 4 is a summary diagram of antibiotic test results obtainable using an embodiment of the invention;

- 5 Figure 5 is a diagram showing an assay plate for testing bacterial samples for antibiotic resistance;

Figure 6 shows the effect of Phage 10359 and 50 mg / litre ampicillin with ampicillin-sensitive and resistant cultures of
10 *E. coli* 10243, in which O represents the results with sensitive *E. coli* 10243 with ampicillin and phage 10359, V represents the results with no lytic agents and □ represents the results with resistant *E. coli* 10243 with ampicillin and phage; and

15 Figure 7 shows the effect of chloramphenical (34 mg/litre) and phage 10359 on cultures of *E. coli* 10243, in which O represents phage only, V represents phage 10359 and chloramphenicol, □ represents chloramphenicol alone and ♦ represents no phage or chloramphenicol.
20

Example 1

Comparison of extracellular and total adenylate kinase contents of a culture

25 For example, in one embodiment, a sample of bacterial cells is divided into first and second samples. The first sample of bacterial cells is mixed with a solution containing ADP and a detergent in the presence of magnesium ions. This extracts the adenylate kinase from all the cells present in the sample,
30 thus allowing the ATP generating reaction to occur. The reaction is allowed to proceed for the required time e.g. 5 minutes, after which bioluminescence reagent is added and the

resulting light measured in a luminometer. An assay performed in this way determines the total amount of adenylate kinase in a sample, be it extracellular or intracellular.

- 5 The second sample is subjected to a similar assay but in the absence of detergent so that only extracellular adenylate kinase is measured.

Example 2

- 10 Use of Immunocapture to separate target cells from a mixed suspension.

An immunocapture assay for *Salmonella typhimurium* from a pure sample and from a sample also containing 3.5×10^5 *Bacillus subtilis* var *niger* (BG) vegetative cells was carried out.

- 15 Immunocapture assay carried out in a total volume of 300 μ l. The immunocapture step, onto magnetic microbeads coated with *S. typhimurium* specific antibody, took 10 minutes. The immobilised beads were washed to remove unbound particles, and a non-specific lysis step was carried out to release adenylate 20 kinase from bound material. This was detected using a 5 minute adenylate kinase assay.

The results are shown in Figure 2. The graphs show that about 70% of the target cells can be selectively removed from 25 suspension, and that this is largely unaffected by the presence of contaminating material (the BG cells).

Example 3

Use of Phage Mediated Lysis

- 30 The time course of adenylate kinase release from a culture of *Escherichia coli* cells, some of which were infected with *E. coli* specific bacteriophage was studied. 100 μ l samples (each

containing just 350 cells) were removed at timed intervals from a culture that had been infected with an *E.coli* specific bacteriophage and then assayed for extracellular adenylate kinase activity after 40 minutes. The results are shown in
5 Figure 3 where O = infected culture, and ● non-infected control.

It is clear from these results that fewer than 500 cells are detectable using this method.

10

Example 4

Antibiotic sensitivity assays:-lytic antibiotic

Sample cells (which may be mixed or pure cultures) are split into 2 fractions and one infected with bacteriophage. Each of
15 these fractions is then further split into 2 fractions with one being exposed to antibiotic and the other left untreated. The relative levels of extracellular adenylate kinase produced in a set time shows the effects of both the antibiotic and bacteriophage on the target cells. Test results achieved in
20 practise are illustrated in Table 1.

The results show both the antibiotic resistance state of the cells and controls to ensure that the test has functioned correctly.

25

Table 1**Susceptible Bacteria**

<u>(1) No antibiotic, no phage</u> Low extracellular adenylylate kinase levels only, (no lysis).	<u>(2) Antibiotic, no phage</u> adenylylate kinase released through lysis due to antibiotic.
<u>(3) No antibiotic, plus phage</u> adenylylate kinase released through lysis caused by phage.	<u>(4) Antibiotic plus phage</u> adenylylate kinase released though lysis due to antibiotic and phage. Levels lower than (3) because of reduced cell growth and inhibition of phage replication.

5

Resistant Bacteria

<u>(1) No antibiotic, no phage</u> Low extracellular adenylylate kinase levels only, (no lysis).	<u>(2) Antibiotic, no phage</u> Low extracellular adenylylate kinase levels only, (no lysis). Same as (1).
<u>(3) No antibiotic, plus phage</u> adenylylate kinase released through lysis caused by phage.	<u>(4) Antibiotic plus phage</u> adenylylate kinase released through lysis due to phage. Same as (3).

Example 5Antibiotic sensitivity assays:-non-lytic antibiotic or10 biostatic agent

The susceptibility of bacteria to antibiotics which do not cause cell lysis, but inhibit cell growth in other ways, (and other chemicals which inhibit bacterial cell growth, such as

biostatic agents) can also be rapidly determined using a similar method.

Sensitivity testing of bacteria in mixed culture to non-lytic antibiotics would be carried out in the same way as testing for susceptibility to antibiotics causing lysis. However, since the bacteria must be actively growing to permit bacteriophage infection, susceptibility to antibiotic would be indicated by a lack of phage mediated lysis in the treated sample.

The results which would be observed are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

15

Susceptible Bacteria

<u>(1) No antibiotic, no phage</u> Low extracellular adenylylate kinase levels only, (no lysis).	<u>(2) Antibiotic, no phage</u> Low extracellular adenylylate kinase levels only, (no lysis). May be even lower than (1) through inhibition of growth.
<u>(3) No antibiotic, plus phage</u> adenylylate kinase released through lysis caused by phage.	<u>(4) Antibiotic plus phage</u> Low extracellular adenylylate kinase levels only, (no lysis). May be even lower than (1) through inhibition of growth.

Table 2 contd
Resistant Bacteria

<u>(1) No antibiotic, no phage</u> Low extracellular adenylate kinase levels only, (no lysis).	<u>(2) Antibiotic, no phage</u> Low extracellular adenylate kinase levels only, (no lysis). Same as (1).
<u>3) No antibiotic, plus phage</u> adenylate kinase released through lysis caused by phage.	<u>4) Antibiotic plus phage</u> adenylate kinase released through lysis due to phage. Same as (3).

5

Example 6

Test Kit for testing for antibiotic resistance

A suitable test kit comprises a sample container which typically might be a plastic plate in which are formed a 10 number of wells as illustrated in Figure 5. The total volume of liquid that could be held in each well may be approximately 0.5ml. The plates are suitably pre-prepared so that particular wells would contain appropriate freeze-dried (or otherwise preserved) preparations of antibiotics and/or 15 bacteriophages, and optionally also selective growth media.

In a plate such as shown in Figure 5, each row of 4 wells is designed to be used to test for resistance to a particular antibiotic, so using this plate, 3 antibiotics could be tested 20 simultaneously.

In use, about 0.2ml volume of the samples for test, which may be pure cultures, preparations enriched by immunocapture,

samples from selective media or neat samples as appropriate, are added to each well. After incubation at, for example 37°C for 1 hour, reagents to measure the adenylate kinase activity, may be added. These may be reagents which produce a 5 colorimetric signal in the presence of adenylate kinase, or more preferably, reagents which generate a bioluminescence signal.

In particular ADP and a source of magnesium ions, followed 10 after 5 minutes by luciferin and luciferase, would be added. The light emission would either be determined 1 well at a time by transfer to tubes and measurement in a tube luminometer, or, preferably, the plate would be assayed automatically in a plate luminometer or be imaged as a whole using a CCD camera 15 system.

Example 7

Comparison of the effect of lytic and non-lytic antibiotics on culture growth

20 The effect of lytic (ampicillin) and non-lytic (chloramphenicol) antibiotics on *E. coli* culture growth were examined.

A plasmid encoding ampicillin resistance (pUC18) was 25 introduced into a pure culture of *E. coli* 10243 in order to induce resistance without altering phage host specificity. The resistant strain was also tested to ensure that carrying the plasmid did not alter its growth rate or infection by phage 10359, and was seen to be the same as the sensitive strain 30 regarding growth and infection.

The adenylate kinase released from sensitive (untransformed) bacteria and resistant bacteria in the presence of the *E. coli* bacteriophage 10359 and either a lytic (ampicillin) or non-lytic (chloramphenicol) antibiotic were compared.

5

Log phase cultures of both resistant and sensitive strains of *E. coli* 10243 were infected with 10^5 phage 10359 at T_0 and 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ ampicillin at T_5 . Cell lysis due to ampicillin was evident at T_{10} and significant at T_{20} in the sensitive strain, 10 masking any lytic effects due to bacteriophage. The resistant strain was unaffected by the antibiotic but showed lysis due to phage infection after 20 minutes, although this was not significant until T_{40} . The results are shown in Figure 6. This shows that after only 40 min incubation in the presence 15 of ampicillin and phage, the susceptibility of a culture of *E. coli* 10243 towards ampicillin can be determined.

Log phase cultures of *E. coli* 10243 were incubated in the presence of phage 10359 and / or chloramphenicol (34 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$) 20 over a period of 80 min and assayed for adenylate kinase as before. The results are shown in Figure 7.

Greater cell lysis was demonstrated where cultures were incubated with both bacteriophage and chloramphenicol compared 25 with chloramphenicol alone. Although chloramphenicol is not a lytic antibiotic, cell lysis were exhibited over the course of the incubation, probably due to cell death. The degree of phage mediated lysis was considerably less in cultures containing the antibiotic, because the bacteria were not 30 growing well and thus prevented the phage from completing their replication cycle.

Following the results obtained with the ampicillin resistant mutant, it would be expected that a chloramphenicol resistant mutant would behave the same in both the presence and absence of the antibiotic. Therefore, after a 60 min incubation, the
5 degree of increase in background luminescence would indicate whether or not a culture was susceptible to chloramphenicol.

Claims

1. The use of an assay for adenylate kinase in an *in vitro* test for the effect of external conditions on the growth characteristics of bacterial cells.
2. The use according to claim 1 wherein the test is for the sensitivity of a bacteria to an antibiotic or biostatic agent.
- 10 3. The use according to claim 1 wherein the test is to assess the growth stage of the bacteria.
4. A method for determining the susceptibility of a bacteria to a reagent, which method comprises assaying for the adenylate kinase released by lysis of bacteria from a culture containing said reagent and comparing the results with those obtained from a similar adenylate kinase assay which is either of the culture prior to addition of reagent, and/or of lysed bacteria from the same culture at a different point in time 20 and/or of lysed bacteria from a similar culture which does not contain the reagent.
5. A method according to claim 4 wherein bacteria are lysed using a chemical lytic agent.
- 25 6. A method according to claim 4 wherein the lytic agent is specific for a particular bacteria.
7. A method according to claim 6 wherein the lytic agent is a bacteriophage which infects and lyses a specific bacterial genus, species or strain.

8. A method according to claim 4 wherein bacteria are lysed using an enzyme.

9. A method according to claim 8 wherein the enzyme is
5 bacteriolysin.

10. A method according to claim to any one of claims 3 to 9 wherein the bacteria are first subjected to a separation step to substantially remove any other non-target bacteria in the
10 culture.

11. A method according to claim 10 wherein the separation is carried out using an immunocapture method.

15 12. A method according to claim 11 wherein the said bacteria are concentrated at a solid surface on which antibodies or the binding fragments thereof which are specific for the target bacteria are immobilized.

20 13. A method according to any one of claims 4 to 12 wherein the culture further comprises a growth medium which selectively favours the said bacteria.

14. A method according to claim 4 for determining the
25 sensitivity of a bacteria to a lytic antibiotic, said method comprising the steps of (i) separating said bacteria from other microbial species (ii) determining the extracellular adenylate kinase content of a culture of said bacteria (iii) adding the lytic antibiotic to the culture and incubating it
30 for a period sufficient to allow the antibiotic to exert its lytic effect, and (iv) determining the extracellular adenylate kinase content of the culture to assess whether lysis has taken place.

15. A method according to claim 14 wherein in step (i), the bacteria are separated using immunocapture techniques.

5 16. A method according to claim 14 or claim 15 wherein the said culture of bacteria comprises a selective growth medium which favours said bacteria.

10 17. A method according to claim 4 for determining the sensitivity of a bacteria to a non-lytic antibiotic or biostatic agent, said method comprising (i) separating said bacteria from other microbial species, (ii) incubating a culture of said bacteria in the presence of said non-lytic antibiotic or biostatic agent (iii) determining whether the 15 total adenylate kinase content of the culture increases or decreases over the period of the incubation by removing samples at spaced time periods, lysing bacteria in these samples and assaying for adenylate kinase in said samples.

20 18. A method according to claim 17 wherein the bacteria are lysed using a chemical lytic agent.

19. A method according to claim 17 or claim 18 wherein in 25 step (i), the bacteria are separated using immunocapture techniques.

20. A method according to any one of claims 17 to 19 wherein the said culture of bacteria comprises a selective growth medium which favours said bacteria.

21. A method for determining the sensitivity of a bacteria to an antibiotic or biostatic agent, said method comprising

- (a) incubating a first sample of a culture of said bacteria, a second sample in the presence of said antibiotic, a third sample in the presence of a bacteriophage which will specifically lyse said target bacteria and a fourth sample in the presence of both said bacteriophage and said antibiotic;
- 10 (b) determining the adenylate kinase content of each of the first to fourth samples after culture, and
- (c) determining the sensitivity or resistivity of the bacteria on the basis of the adenylate kinase assay results and on the mode of action of the antibiotic or 15 biostatic agent.

22. A method according to claim 21 wherein the results obtained in step (c) are compared with the results given in Figure 4 herein to determine whether the bacteria is resistant 20 or susceptible to the antibiotic or biostatic agent.

23. A method according to claim 21 or claim 22 wherein concentration of the said bacteria in the culture is increased prior to step (a) by an immunocapture procedure.

25

24. A method according to any one of claims 21 to 23 wherein the said samples further comprise a selective growth medium which favours growth of said bacteria in preference to other microbial species.

30

25. A method of determining the growth phase of a bacterial culture which method comprises

- 5 (a) subjecting a first sample of said bacterial culture to a lytic reagent so as to lyse bacterial cells therein,
- (b) assaying for adenylate kinase in said first sample,
- (c) assaying for adenylate kinase in a second sample of said culture which has not been exposed to the lytic agent; and
- (c) comparing the results obtained from said first and second
- 10 cultures and assessing the growth stage of the culture.

26. A method according to claim 25 wherein in step (c), results showing that adenylate kinase levels in the second samples which are of the order of 1% of the levels found in the first sample is indicative of a healthy, log phase culture and levels in excess of 1% are indicative of a progression into stationary phase.

27. A method according to claim 25 or claim 26 wherein the lytic agent comprises a detergent or a bacteriophage which specifically infects and lyses particular target bacterial cells.

28. A test kit for testing the sensitivity of bacteria to antibiotics, said kit comprising one or more antibiotics, and one or more reagents necessary for assaying for adenylate kinase.

29. A test kit according to claim 28 wherein the said reagents necessary for assaying for adenylate kinase comprise ADP, a source of magnesium ions, luciferin and luciferase.

30. A test kit according to claim 28 or claim 29 wherein the antibiotics are freeze-dried.

31. A test kit according to any one of claims 28 to 30 which
5 further comprises a lytic agent.

32. A test kit according to claim 31 wherein the lytic agent comprises a chemical agent.

10 33. A test kit according to claim 31 wherein the lytic agent comprises a bacteriophage which is specific for the particular target bacterial cells.

15 34. A test kit according to any one of claims 28 to 33 which further comprises a multi-well plate.

35 The use according to claim 1 substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the Examples.

20 36. A method according to claim 4 substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the Examples.

37. A test kit substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to Example 6.

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Fig.1.

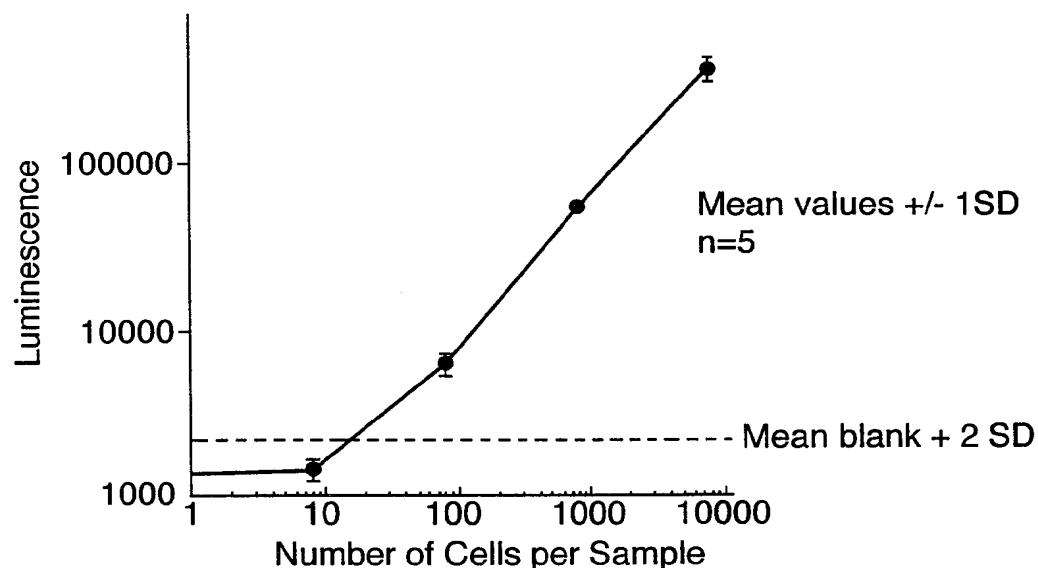
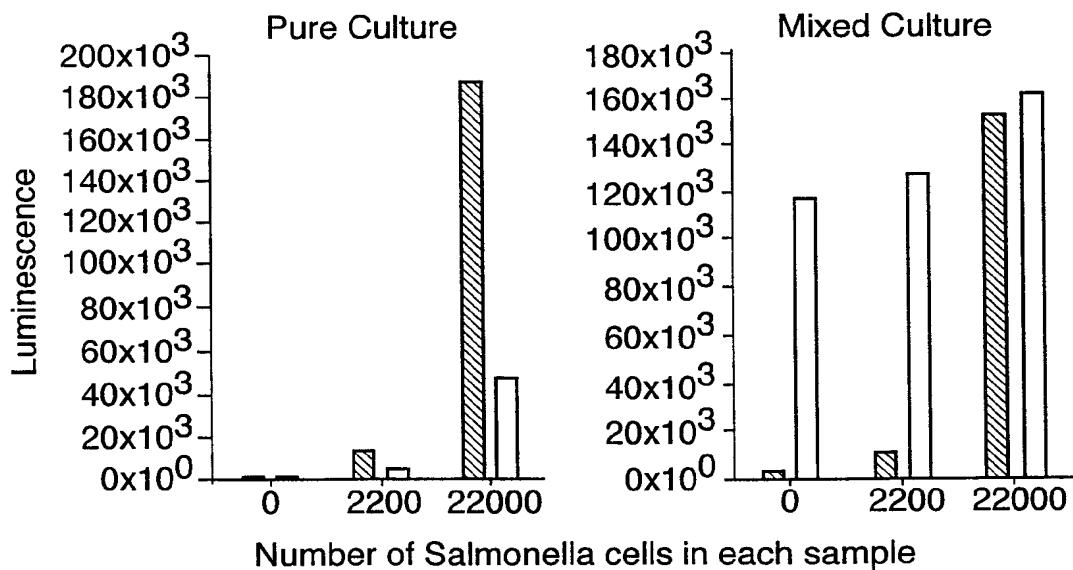


Fig.2.



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Fig.3.

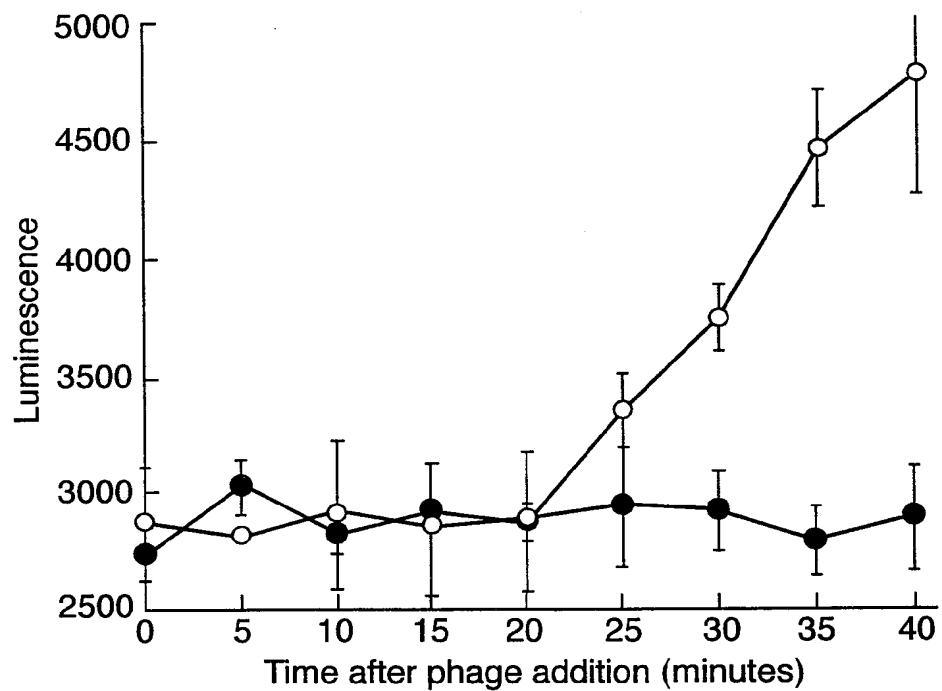
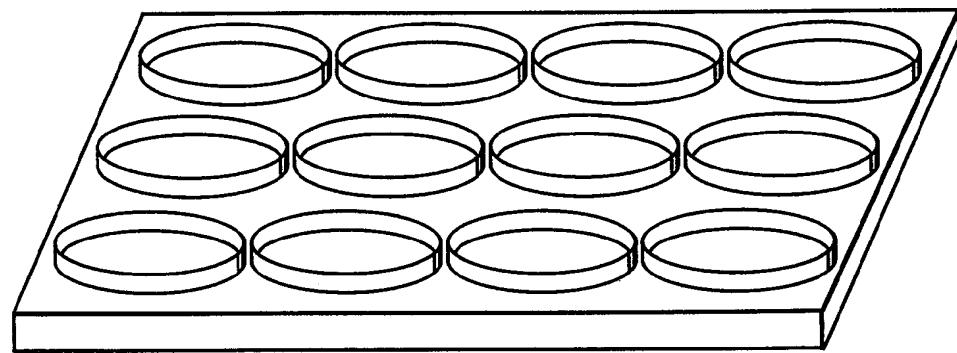


Fig.5.



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Fig.4.

Results from a test with a lytic antibiotic

No additions	Plus antibiotic	No additions	Plus antibiotic		
—	+	—	—		
Plus phage	Plus phage and antibiotic	Plus phage	Plus phage and antibiotic		
+	+	+	+	SUSCEPTIBLE	
RESISTANT		RESISTANT			

Results from a test with a non-lytic antibiotic

No additions	Plus antibiotic	No additions	Plus antibiotic		
—	—	—	—		
Plus phage	Plus phage and antibiotic	Plus phage	Plus phage and antibiotic		
+	—	+	+	SUSCEPTIBLE	
RESISTANT		RESISTANT			

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Fig.6.

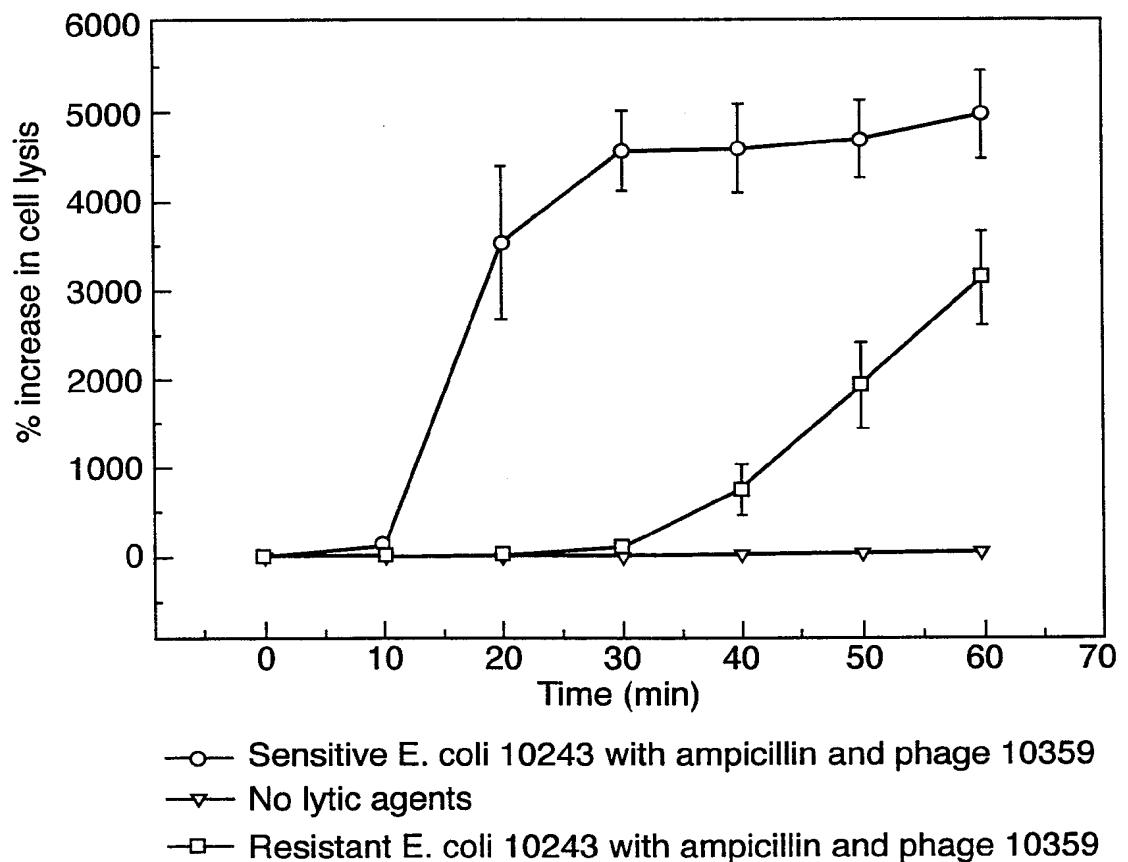
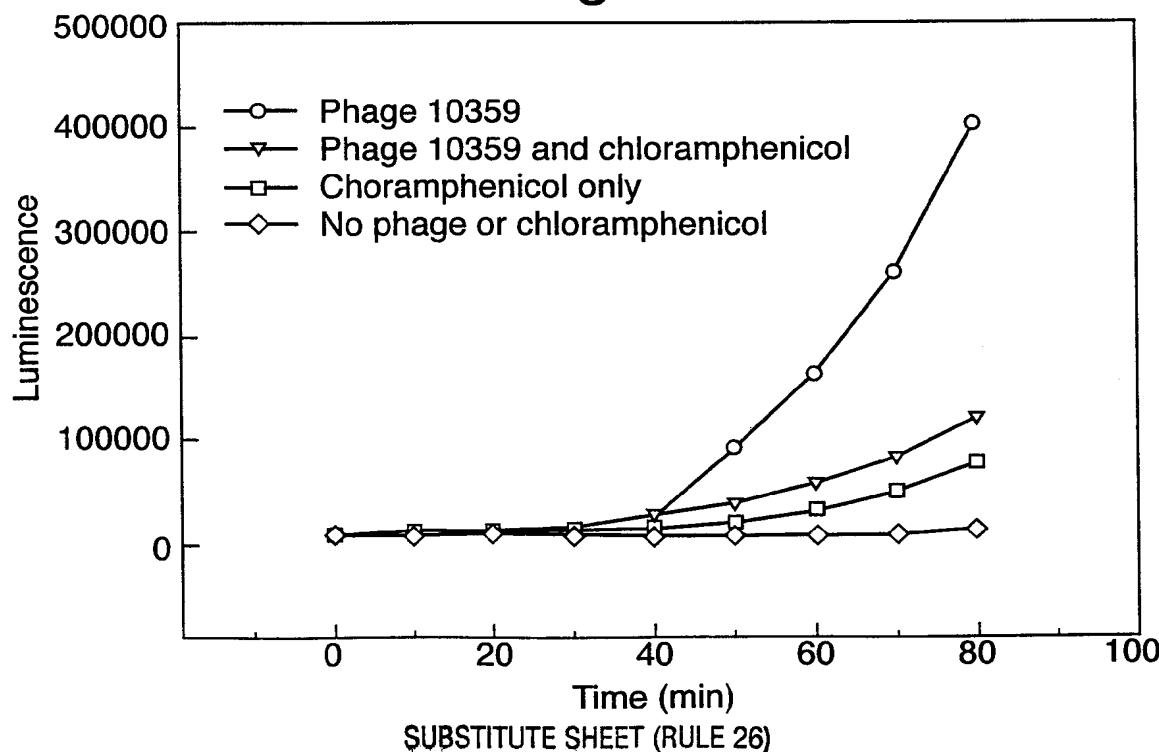


Fig.7.



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/GB 99/00089

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 IPC 6 C12Q1/18 C12Q1/06 C12Q1/48

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
 IPC 6 C12Q

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	WO 96 02666 A (SECR DEFENCE ; SQUIRRELL DAVID JAMES (GB)) 1 February 1996	1-5, 10-12, 28-32, 34-36
A	see abstract	6-9, 13-27, 33, 37
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

Date of mailing of the international search report

6 May 1999

10/06/1999

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
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